

## CHAPTER 91

July 14, 2011

“Hey senpai-“

“TWENTY FOUR!”

Justin had fallen asleep on his desk when Rise had come up to him, poking him a bit as she tried to get his attention. It seemed she hadn't really noticed Justin had fallen asleep; though Justin sure as hell hadn't seemed to notice that class was over. Rise, needless to say was a little confused by Justin's half-assed attempt at giving an answer to a question that didn't actually exist. So was Justin once he realized it was just Rise behind him. He was actually a little embarrassed to have made an ass out of himself without any reason. At least if he had been called on in class, it would look like he tried... So long as it was a math question. God help him if it was an English one.

“Um...” Rise mumbled slightly, a little caught off guard by Justin's panicked frenzy. He calmed down eventually though; and once he did, his face was slightly red. He was a little curious as to what Rise was doing in his classroom right now though. They were in separate grades after all, so she had to have come looking for him or one of the other investigation team members. And looking around the room at the moment, it seemed the only one there was Justin. No seriously; he was the only one in the room besides Rise. Everyone had apparently left without bothering to try and wake him up. *Gee, thanks a lot Chie...*

“...Jesus, how long was I out for...?” Justin muttered to himself, rubbing his eyes a bit as he tried to wake himself up completely. Justin was half expecting Rise to answer that for him, but she didn't really know when Justin had fallen asleep, so she couldn't say. It was quiet for a moment as Justin rubbed away at his face, trying to wake up. “Hey Rise, what's up?” Justin eventually spoke up, breaking the silence as he finally nodded back into reality. Rise smiled slightly; at least he seemed to be awake now.

“Hey senpai, I was wondering if you had a moment.” Rise smiled with innocence in her voice. Justin wasn't entirely sure why she always sounded so excited as of late, but hey, he could get used to it. Much better than the gloomy Rise he had met the first time they encountered each other. Justin smiled slightly before leaning back in his chair a bit. Given that Chie hadn't dragged his unconscious body to the library to help her study, he was going to say ‘yes, it seems my schedule has suddenly cleared up.’

“Yeah sure.”

"The test coming up covers a lot of subjects... I won't be able to study enough unless someone helps me." Rise frowned slightly. Justin's eyebrows shot up in immediate surprise. Not because she was asking Justin to help her study, she didn't know better. No, he was surprised that she was taking the exams. She had been here for all of... three days. There is no way in hell she was going to get in a quarter's worth of knowledge in such a timeframe. Though Justin supposed that's why she was asking around for help.

"They're actually making you take the exams?" Justin questioned, still very much surprised. Rise made a slight noise of disgust; not at Justin, mind you, but rather at the test and the school administration. She had no problem taking exams. She had a problem taking exams on material she couldn't possibly know. Justin felt awful for her. God knows half the stuff that was going to come up on that test was neither going to be relevant to the subject, nor more than just a passing comment ONCE in the classroom.

"I know right! Can you believe that...?" Rise ranted slightly. She was very angry about this in all honesty. It wasn't fair that she was going to be graded on stuff she couldn't possibly know... But then, she supposed she really didn't have to worry about getting good grades. Of course, that's what she thought. Justin knew better. In ten years, Rise's celebrity status would most likely be long gone. Not that he would ever dare say that to her face, but he knew she shouldn't just brush aside academics because she had it made not.

"So... what, you need my help studying?" Justin questioned. He had figured as much, but considering she had said she needed 'someone' and not 'you,' he wasn't going to make an ass out of himself. Rise only nodded and made a slight grunt of confirmation in response to Justin's horribly idiotic inquiry. Justin in turn only smiled a bit. It's strange; Rise was the only one to not question Justin's academic capabilities prior to seeing his exam grades. Not even Kanji seemed to think he was the brightest bulb in the bunch. It was amazing how much confidence she had in what was essentially a complete stranger. "Alright, push that desk over a little."

"Thank you soooooo much!" Rise shouted with glee. Justin could swear she jumped a little too. She was probably a little enthusiastic about studying... though... Was that what she was so excited about? Maybe she was just happy that someone had offered her the help. Justin smiled a wide grin at her as she hurriedly threw all her books on the table, frantically flipping pages about as though trying to prove something. Her determination was kind of adorable in a way. "I'll do my best to make you proud, Senpai!" She shouted with resolve as she finished flipping her book open. Justin couldn't help but laugh at that.

"Trust me Rise, you don't have to work for that." Justin joked. He was plenty proud of her as it was; she had put up with the awful shit her shadow had done, she was going to try and help them catch a murderer, and even then she was still working

hard in academics. But more importantly, she had saved his life... More importantly she had saved Chie's life. And for that, Justin would be forever grateful. Rise blushed ever so slightly, a child-like grin on her face.

"Please don't laugh at me even if I get it wrong!" Rise continued, still very determined, but also kind of self-conscious. Justin just sort of shook his head, a wide grin on his face.

"I would never!" Justin chuckled. Rise smiled a bit before staring at her book for a moment, tapping the side of her head with a pencil, deep in thought.

"Alright... So how do I solve this...?" Rise remarked, as she copied a problem down on a paper, before shifting it about so Justin could read it. Justin was good at math, especially math from a grade lower than him, so this should be a walk in the park for him... *Yep. Definitely a walk in the park... Uh... Let me read that again, just to be sure...*

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*Okay... What the fuck.* Justin shifted his gaze up to Rise, a look of disbelief on his face. Of course, Rise just sort of laughed as she noticed how completely bewildered Justin was right now.

"I'm just joking." She giggled slightly. Justin wasn't sure whether or not he should be relieved. She certainly had been able to fool him, that was for sure. But it wasn't exactly a funny joke. Still, Justin smiled in defeat, knowing Rise had been able to outsmart him with wit and sarcasm. That was much more of an impressive feat than it sounds when you consider who she had bested in those categories. "Hey Justin... Can I ask you something?" Rise spoke up, her expression sobering up for some reason. Justin was a little caught off-guard by the sudden mood-change.

"Have I given you reason to think you couldn't?" Justin remarked snidely. Rise smiled only a little; she had something serious to ask, and Justin making a joke out of everything wasn't helping. Still, she supposed the reason she felt comfortable asking him, and not say Yosuke, was because he didn't take ANYTHING serious. Unless you seriously hurt someone or someone he loved, generally he didn't give a shit. It made it easier knowing he was a friendly face, she supposed.

"Now that I'm getting the hang of school, I want to go out more and see the sights. But I tend to get recognized everywhere I go, so I'm a little nervous about going out on my own... And you seem like the type of guy who knows all the cool spots in town." Rise tried to sidestep the question slightly; being as indirect as possible. Justin got the hint though. He smiled slightly.

"Cool spots and me aren't exactly synonymous, but yeah, sure." Justin smiled warmly at her. He wasn't crazy about walking around with a celebrity everywhere, but she was a nice kid. He supposed he could put up with her every once and a

while. Besides, she might need a bodyguard; and what did Justin do better than crack skulls? Rise was... well, excited would be a huge understatement. She had managed to knock her book off the desk when she threw her arms to the sky with excitement. Justin couldn't help but chuckle a bit to himself. She was like a child at the carnival.

"Really? Woohoo!"

"I can't take another bite. My stomach's full..."

Rise had damn near pulled Justin kicking and screaming over to Souzai Daigaku. Not that he was complaining or anything, but he thought he could walk there without Rise trying to tug him every which way and that. His wrist was actually getting a little sore from her pulling at them every twelve seconds. Just once, he'd like to go somewhere with a girl without them tugging him around like a ragdoll. Seriously, he had feet. He could walk on his own. *It's no problem ladies, just leave my wrists be.* Rise had finished eating something when she started moaning, her stomach feeling as though it were going to burst open at any second. Justin only got a drink; he couldn't stand all that fried fish and sushi crap. Really, just fish in general didn't settle with him. But what did, was sugar. Lots. And Lots. Of sugar. This was actually, like his fifth Cola. And you thought the guy was addicted to cigarettes; no sir-ee! He was a coke addict.

"But that really hit the spot! I've been wanting to come here. But it's a little embarrassing to show up alone, you know?" Rise seemed half excited, half saddened. She didn't like the concept of walking around town by herself. And why would she? The paparazzi was a bitch, and obviously pissing off Rise around her friends was not a good idea. Especially when her friends included Justin. Basically put, she went alone, media outburst; Justin went with her, not a camera in sight. Still, it seemed a bit strange to not want to go anywhere alone.

"I take it you don't eat out much, then." Justin remarked, taking one last gulp of his can before crushing it and throwing it over his shoulder. There was a trash can behind him that he was trying to get the can in without looking, but he missed completely. And he didn't care enough to pick it up and put it where it belonged. It would take the entirety of City 17's police force to get him to pick up that can.

"Nope! If someone snapped a photo of me doing that, I'd hear it from my agency." Strangely, Rise didn't seem the slightest bit bothered by her agency pretty much telling her what she could and couldn't do, what and where she could eat. Justin raised his eyebrow a bit. She seemed less bothered by the paparazzi and more so her agency. And Justin couldn't really blame her. The agency was the one who made her to be what she was on television. The agency made Risetete, and

unfortunately, Rise was the one who got in trouble any time Risetete stepped out of line.

“Why not just tell your agency to fuck off? They don’t get to control your life, you know that, right?” Justin questioned. Rise just shook her head a bit. Justin didn’t quite understand what happens when you piss off your agency. Besides, she couldn’t just tell them to fuck off. Maybe Justin could, but she had a little more class than that.

“I couldn’t do that, I’d get in so much trouble!” Rise countered. Justin sighed a bit, leaning back against the wall of the establishment they had just wasted way too much money in today. He supposed she was right. If there was one thing you needed to know about the media, it was that any given moment on any given day, they could make your life a living hell. They were not the kind of people you wanted to cross. Well... Maybe not a sane person. Justin always wanted to see what would happen if he could piss off the major media outlets. What were they going to do? Plaster his face all over the news? Pfft- Boring. Rise sighed slightly, suddenly having taken the wrong turn down memory lane. Not that they were bad memories; in fact, they were very good ones. And that was the problem. She really missed those days sometimes. “The last time I ate out was at a festival when I was still a little kid. Back then, it was me and my family... It was fun.” Rise reminisced.

“I think I went to a festival once in my entire life...” Justin mused out loud. Though where as Rise’s trip down memory lane had been nostalgic, Justin’s had been nightmare inducing. “My father took me. I was maybe six or seven at the time...” Justin sighed slightly a look of disappointment on his face. His father wasn’t always a bad man. For the first half of Justin’s life, his father had been his hero. He went where he was needed to stop the big bad men that haunted his little boy’s dreams, after all. What kid wouldn’t want a cop for a father? I mean... It sucked having all those kids bully him on a daily basis, but he had his dad right? His dad would never abandon him...

But then he found the bottle. And then he got violent. Justin could remember the first time he had come home stinkin’ drunk, the bottle in his hand. He was too young to understand what the alcohol did to him... But you’re never too young to understand what a sharp projectile meant. He had nightmares for weeks after it first happened... Hell he still had them once in a while. He couldn’t shake the memory anymore these days. But why? That man, the one with the bottle in his hand... That wasn’t his father. The one who had taken Justin to the carnival, the one who made sure there were no bad guys hiding in his closet... That was his father. That man who came home in a drunken stupor every night? He was just a monster wearing his father’s face. And yet the memory still haunted Justin at every turn. Even now he found a slight shiver in his spine as he thought about it. It wasn’t a pleasant memory to say the least.

"So the last time you ate out was when you were a kid... Jesus that sounds awful." Justin quickly tried to shift the topic away from him and back to Rise. There had been a brief moment of silence while Justin remembered the demon that haunted his childhood, and Justin was fully aware of it. He didn't want Rise worrying about it. He could face his personal demons without bringing her down with him. Besides, they were here to have fun right? If this had been the first time she had gone out to eat since she was a child, then Justin was going to make it a pleasant memory for her. Rise seemed a little concerned about that moment of silence, but other than that, she was still excited to be up and about.

"To tell you the truth, I've wanted to do this since I was a child. My parents were actually pretty strict." Rise mused out loud. Justin paused for a moment, just nodding his head to indicate he had heard her at first. It took a moment before he smirked back. He had to push those lingering thoughts about his father out of his head; it wasn't just something he could do instantaneously. It took effort. "I didn't really have many friends."

"I can relate. I only had two friends throughout middle school. One of them was a smoke dealer that's four or five years older than me, and the other is my sister. Not exactly the most amazing selection of friends." Justin jabbed at himself. The way he put it, they sounded like terrible people to get all buddy buddy with. In actuality, there was only one person he trusted more than those two... Okay, maybe Yu had Kurt topped by a little bit. BUT IT'S CLOSE, I ASSURE YOU.

"Really?" Rise seemed surprised that there was someone out there that had gone through the same thing... Just minus the illegal cigarettes and sister part. She was actually a little surprised to hear Justin didn't have many friends growing up. She would have thought Justin would have friends coming out the wazoo. Sure he could be a bit short-tempered, but when he was in a good-mood he was one of the sweetest guys she had ever known. And that very well might be saying something. Justin nodded his head in confirmation.

"Yeah. But the important thing you need to realize is that if they don't want to be your friend just the way you are, then they aren't worth the hassle. You could find millions of people out there better than them. Hell, I've found at least a dozen of them since I moved here." Justin smiled slightly, though not quite as much as Rise. Justin had nearly forgotten about that whole 'real me' thing she had going on... But he couldn't really lie to her. There was a Rise and there was Rissette, there was no denying it. And if the only reason people wanted to be friends with her was because she was Rissette, then there weren't worth keeping around. They should like you for who you are, not what you do. And anyone who tells you otherwise is a complete asshole. No, he couldn't tell her to just get over it. He needed to tell her that she was better off without those people.

"I guess that couldn't be helped, since I hardly ever showed up for school." Rise shrugged slightly, though she was suddenly struck by the realization that she had just dropped that she didn't go to school to Justin. And he had certainly heard. Not that he was angry or confused or anything; he understood what she meant by that... At least, he thought he did. When school and all the bullies got to be too much for Justin to handle, he'd skip out, and just wait in the alleyway for Maya to come back around, to bawl his eyes out until the storm passed. He wasn't sure why Rise hadn't showed up for school, but he could only assume it was for similar reasons. "Er, that's enough talk about that! What a depressing subject, huh? Let's talk about something fun. After all, I don't want to waste the time we have together!" Rise stammered slightly, trying to change the subject. Justin just smirked a bit. It was kind of funny how nervous she was getting, like she needed to make a good first impression or something. As if Justin even cared; a friend is a friend, regardless of what you say.

"We have all the time in the world, Rise. Don't be afraid to speak your mind." Justin reassured her. He had no problem listening to her talk about her childhood. In a way, it was nice to know he wasn't alone in what he went through. I mean, sure, Rise's father hadn't been a drunken child abuser (citation needed), but she knew what it was like to be an outcast. Rise smiled slightly at Justin's remark. If they had all the time in the world, then she didn't want to waste even a second of it.

"It's so great that I came to this town and met you. Really, I'm serious!" Rise gushed with glee. Justin's cheeks turned hot red again. Compliments tended to have that effect on him after all. It was a bit different when a celebrity said it to you though; even if he wasn't talking to Risetete right now. Regardless, it made him almost feel... bigger. Like he wasn't so insignificant in the grand scope of this world.

"Well I guess it's so great I came to this town so you could come to this town to meet me." Justin remarked sarcastically. Rise in turn chuckled a bit before jumping up from her seat with excitement.

"Sooo, why don't I start by asking what kind of girl you like?" Rise questioned with a wide grin. Justin only raised an eyebrow a bit. He understood she wasn't very used to making small talk, but that's not really a great topic of discussion. Besides, she should know what kind of girl Justin li-

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*Oh shit, she doesn't know about me and Chie yet, does she?* Justin cleared his throat a bit.

"Well me and Chie are dating, so I guess that should answer your question." Justin's cheeks were a bit red as the words came out of his mouth, his hands scrambling through his pockets in search of a cigarette. He was expecting this to get really

awkward really quick, but Rise only seemed to smile widely, her face practically glowing as the remark hit her ears.

“Ooooooh! That’s so cute! You two look like you’d make the perfect couple!” Rise gushed a bit. She thought the two of them together in a relationship was just the most adorable thing. After all, they had so much in common from what Rise had seen. Especially the short tempers. But hey, the family that fights together stays together. Justin was honestly a little surprised by the remark. Rise barely knew the two and she already thought they’d make a good couple? Seemed a bit odd but, he wasn’t complaining anytime soon.

“I’d like to think we are anyway. We’ve gone through some tough shit together. If that hasn’t torn us apart, then the only thing left would be the hand of god himself. And I bite the hand that feeds.” Justin remarked with slight pride as he placed a cigarette between the crevices of his teeth, lighting it ablaze and taking a puff of it. Rise didn’t seem too surprised by the cigarette. Mostly because most kids she knew in the business smoked. She was almost used to it by now.

“You should be a poet.” Rise complimented, only slightly sarcastic. Justin shrugged a bit, a grin on his face. It was how he felt, not just some fancy words he had spat out to try and impress.

“Maybe when I go through my emo phase.”